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Linda McCulloch
Superintendent

February 5, 2007

To: Directors of Special Education

From: Bob Runkel

Re: Availability of Electronic Special Education Forms

In November 2006, the OPI posted, on the special education Web site, revised model forms to comply with additional data collection requirements and newly adopted federal regulations. Because many schools use electronic versions of the OPI forms, the task of implementing district-wide and cooperative-wide use of these forms has become a challenge.

Many Montana districts and cooperatives use electronic forms to help teachers complete the necessary special education documentation "paperwork" requirements. The most common electronic program used in our schools is the "Montana Forms." Over the years, Dennis Clarkson, with the support of the Polson School District, made these forms available without cost to schools throughout the state. Subsequently, Dennis retired from the Polson School District and has taken a job in Alaska. Providing a "run time" version of the program is time consuming and, therefore, the Polson School District is no longer able to maintain the support that would be necessary to provide access to the updated forms. The Polson district is able and willing to provide continued access to the old forms; however, these forms do not include the November modifications.

We recognize that this presents a significant problem for you and your staff. There is hope for a solution in the form of a state-funded electronic special education data management system. If everything stays on schedule, the Achievement in Montana (AIM) electronic data system should be available by April 2007. However, we do not expect widespread use of the system until the start of the 2007-2008 school year.

To support your efforts to stay in compliance with documentation and data reporting requirements, we encourage you to use current (November) OPI model forms. Certainly this can be a burden if, in some cases, it means going back to paper versions for preparation of all or part of the documents. However, we believe that the revised OPI model forms accurately reflect federally imposed requirements for documentation and simultaneously establish the data elements that will be necessary for reporting.

"It is the mission of the Office of Public Instruction to improve teaching and learning through communication, collaboration, advocacy, and accountability to those we serve."

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As a footnote, the staff of the Polson School District is feeling pressure to provide access to other school districts for an updated version of the "Montana Forms" that would incorporate the November modifications to the OPI model forms. The "Montana Forms" made available by Dennis Clarkson have no formal connection to the OPI and the Polson School District is under no obligation to provide services to other districts or cooperatives. The "Montana Forms" were provided to other districts and cooperatives through voluntary effort. Please join me in thanking the Polson School District for the many years of support to schools throughout the state.